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C O N F I D E N T I A L DHAKA 001536

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: BANGLADESH STRIKE UPDATE

Classified By: P/E Counselor D.C. McCullough, Reason(s): 1.4 (b),(d)

1. (SBU) The Awami League and its leftist allies, as part of its campaign to bring down the ruling government following the January 27 killing of Shah AMS Kibria, called for a dawn to 2 PM strike (hartal) in Dhaka and a dawn to dusk strike elsewhere in the country. The AL held no strike in Chittagong, the economic capital of Bangladesh, and called for a only four hour strike in the tornado ravaged Gaibandha district, located 300 kilometers north-west of Dhaka.

2. (SBU) In Dhaka, there were few AL protesters evident in the streets but the strike was observed with major shopping stores and markets closed, and only lighter than normal vehicle traffic. Hartal supporters damaged a train compartment in a Dhaka suburb, and there were scattered reports of some vehicles being damaged. There was a large police presence, estimated at 8,000 plus, throughout the city.

3. (SBU) In Khulna, Rajshahi, Jessore, Cox's Bazaar, and Syhlet, as of 1600 local, no incidents were reported.

4. (SBU) Media reports say that the shortened Dhaka hartal was to permit Kibria's family to hold their signature banner display at 1600 local, and the canceling of the hartal in Chittagong was at the request of local business community as well as to permit a major Islamic conference to continue. However, large Chittagong stores and markets were closed. The calling of only a four hour strike in Gaibandha was to permit ongoing relief efforts to continue aiding the 40,000 people affected by a recent tornado.

5. (SBU) When asked about the shortened program, AL Organizing Secretary Ahktar Ahktarruzzaman said the AL did not plan a "strong program" as they did not want to interfere with "O" school level examinations in progress. He said that the AL's next step was to wait for the return of Sheikh Hasina from Singapore on April 7 and then review their caretaker government reform proposals.

THOMAS